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ABSTRACT

This publication provides parenting information concerning infants, toddlers, and children in the preschool, elementary school, early adolescence, and high school years. The section on infants includes material on child care, safety, and the process of learning language. Toddlers are discussed in terms of discipline, rewards, reading aloud, and temper tantrums. The preschool years are discussed in relation to the process of learning to communicate, the development of responsibility, and play. Guidelines for choosing toys and a preschool are offered. Discussion of the elementary school years concerns success in school, parent involvement in school, the process of building confidence, and the development of responsibility. The section on early adolescence covers teenagers' ways of making choices. High school years are discussed in terms of the ways teenagers establish independence, prepare for an occupation, establish values, develop relationships with the opposite sex, and deal with peer pressure. Guidelines for determining whether one's child is abusing drugs or alcohol, and over 20 resources for additional parenting information are provided. (RH)

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PARENTING SKILLS

Bringing Out the Best in Your Child

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

"It is easy to *become* a parent, but difficult to be one,"
wrote the German philosopher Wilhelm Busch.
Yet there is no other role that is more demanding . . .
or more rewarding.

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PARENTING SKILLS

If you're like most of today's parents, you probably feel you've had little preparation for this important responsibility. You may have had few opportunities to care for younger brothers and sisters when you were growing up. And today, you may live too far away from your own parents to rely on them for advice.

If you're a first-time parent, you may also feel isolated. You have less in common with your friends who have no children, but you have not yet had time to meet many new parents. As a result, you may feel unprepared and unequipped for the vitally important responsibility of raising your child.

And if your child is older, you may feel the need to get help as you cope with the changes you see in your child every day. You may even find yourself wishing for a little "on the job training."

As a parent, you know that you are vital to your children's development. But in his reassuring book on child-rearing, *A Good Enough Parent*, noted child psychologist Bruno Bettleheim suggests that it is not necessary to be a "perfect parent":

> In order to raise a child well one ought not to try to be a perfect parent, as much as one should not expect one's child to be, or to become, a perfect individual. Perfection is not within the grasp of ordinary human beings. But it is quite possible to be a good enough parent—that is, a parent who raises his child well.

This publication is designed to be a resource for parents who want to understand more about how children grow and develop. . .and what parents can do to help them along their way. It includes information on how children develop the independence, self-discipline, self-confidence, and skills in communication and cooperation with others that will help them throughout their lives. It also includes a number of resources that can provide additional advice and answers to your questions. And, most important, it will help you bring out the best in your child.

Note: Because this book is about a very important individual —your child—we have used the singular pronoun throughout. We have, however, tried to alternate "his" and "hers."

The First Year

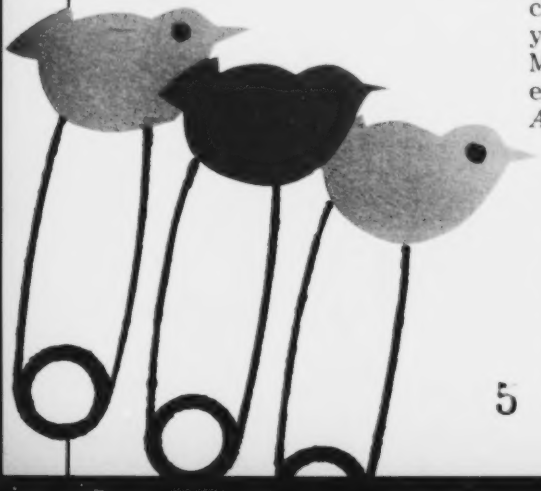
"The greatness of the human personality," observed educator Maria Montessori, "begins at the hour of birth." Doctors can predict many things about a newborn's personality soon after a child is born. Learning to accept and respond to your child's unique character traits is one of the biggest challenges of the first year of life.

Child development researchers Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas, in a landmark study conducted over thirty years ago, pointed to these differences, which they called "temperament." Their work demonstrated that an infant's temperament invades everything she does. They established several "descriptors" of behavior on which babies could be seen as differing, ranging from how much the baby moves to how regular her habits of sleeping and eating are to how well she adapts to strangers. Even how much your baby cries seems to have been programmed into her at birth.

Harvard professor and noted pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton says these "individual differences in the babies are as influential in affecting their parents as are the parents' expectations in influencing the babies." In other words, from the very beginning your child has her own unique needs.

If you have a baby who is excessively fussy, it may well not be the result of anything you are doing wrong. In fact, most babies seem to have a fussy period at the end of the day. Some parents worry that by picking up a fussy baby, they may run the risk of "spoiling" him. You will be relieved to know that researchers now believe that parental instinct—to comfort a crying child—is also important in helping your child's development. As Marguerite Kelly and Elia Parsons explain it in *The Mother's Almanac:*

> The child whose needs are attended to with reasonable speed will learn, as he should, that the world is a dependable place. This trust in others gives him the base he needs to develop trust in the most important person in the world—not you, but himself.



During the first year, when

your child is growing and learning more than she ever will again in her life, your challenge is to help her learn to cope with all those changes in a way that's right for *her*. As you learn more about the special qualities of your baby, you'll both be setting the stage for a lifetime relationship that is unlike any other. No matter how many children you have, each one will be different, and raising each will be special.

And, as Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote at the beginning of his landmark book, *Baby and Child Care*, "You know more than you think you do." Every time you pick up your baby, and every time you show her you love her, you're giving her the feeling that she is loved and belongs to you. And, says Spock, that's a feeling of security that no expert—in fact, no one else in the world—can give to her.

Child Care

By 1990, it is estimated that 75 percent of all U.S. children under the age of 18 will have both parents working outside the home or will be living in a single-parent family with one working parent. For most families today, the decision is not whether a mother will return to work after a baby is born, but *when*.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU CHOOSE CHILD CARE

- Would you want to spend the day here with this person (or persons)?
- What happens when a visitor enters the room? Do the children look up, hungry for a new face, some new excitement? Or do they look up briefly and then return to what they were doing, because they are enjoying the activities planned for them?
- Do the caregivers pay attention to parents at arrival and discharge, allowing them time to express their concerns—or are they glad to see them go? Do they give the child enough time and attention to soften the pain of separation?
- What are transitions between activities like? Does the caregiver help your child move from one activity to another with sensitivity?
- How does the staff handle mealtime? Are they sensitive to the child's need to experiment with food, and do they give even young children a chance to experiment with self-feeding?
- Does the staff welcome parent involvement? Are parents encouraged to drop in to visit any time?

—Adapted from *The New Extended Family: Day Care That Works*, Ellen Galinsky and W.A. Hook, 1977, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

In some cases, of course, a mother has no choice but to return to work soon after her child is born. But most experts recommend that, whenever possible, mothers should plan to spend at least the first four months at home. The first three months of life, says Brazelton, are "turbulent." Children are often unpredictable and fussy. But after four months, he says, a mother has learned to know her baby. And she knows her baby's smile is "*for her.*" At this time, he says, the stress of separation is less for both mother and child.

Of course, when a mom does return to work, it's important to choose a caregiver carefully. There are many alternatives—someone who cares for your child in your home, a "day care mother" who cares for several children in her home, or a more traditional day care center. There is no one "best" form of child care for all children, but some approaches are more successful with some children than others. Your responsibility is to choose the care that is best for your child—and to stay in close contact with your child care provider to make sure your child continues to receive the attention needed to grow and develop.

Safety

Accidents pose the greatest single health threat to children and account for 45 percent of all childhood deaths. Suffocation, automobile accidents, choking, fires or burns, and falls are the most common fatal accidents. *Parents* magazine recommends these minimal safety precautions to prevent common childhood accidents:

► **Choking.** Never feed your baby large or hard pieces of food. Don't allow your baby near anything that is easily swallowed (loosely fastened button eyes, small wheels from an older child's toy car).

► **Automobile injuries.** Buy and *use* an approved child safety seat.

► **Suffocation.** Make sure the slats in the crib or playpen are not more than 2-3/8 inches apart. Keep all balloons, plastic bags, and strings or cords away from your baby, crib, and playpen.

► **Fires and burns.** Never smoke near your baby. Never leave anything hot (such as a cup of coffee) where your baby can reach it. Cover all unused electric sockets. Be sure your baby cannot reach any electric cords from her crib or playpen.

► **Falls.** Fence or gate all stairwells. Never leave your baby anywhere she can fall (changing table, bed), even for a minute.

► **Poisoning.** Keep out of your baby's reach anything you don't want her to taste. Lock up medicines, cleansers, pesticides, bleaches, cosmetics, alcohol, perfume, and paints. Don't allow your child to chew on any painted objects, and make sure you use only lead-free paint on any furniture for your baby's room.

(Be sure and post the number for your local poison control center near your telephone.)

Learning Language

From the day your child is born (and, according to some researchers, even before that), your child is learning language. Language is the foundation of all other learning—and your child acquires it at home. You can help by talking with her as much as possible. When you are dressing her, for example, you can say things like, "Now we'll put the shoe on your foot."

Because speaking requires children to develop control over a great many small muscles, most children will not say more than a few words during their first year of life. But you will recognize that even at an early age, your child *understands* a great many more words than she is able to *speak*.

Toddlers

"Children need models more than they need critics," wrote Frenchman Joseph Joubert in 1842. That advice is never more true. . .or more difficult to follow. . .than when your child is a toddler. The toddler years, generally ages 1–3, are a time when your child develops independence, which he will do mostly by testing every rule and boundary he encounters.

It's no coincidence that so many parents speak about "The Terrible Two's"; children at this age can be difficult. But in all his struggles with you, your child is working on his primary task: forging a sense of himself as an individual. He needs your support and love to recognize that his need for autonomy is accepted—even if the specific methods he chooses to exercise his independence are not.

Discipline

This is the age when discipline becomes an issue in many families, because this is the time when children need parents to set limits. By establishing guidelines for appropriate behavior now, you will be setting the stage for the *self-discipline* your child will need to become successful in school and in later life.

Lilian Katz, professor of early childhood education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, says the goal of discipline is to have children internalize limits and boundaries set by parents. And Dr. Lee Salk, a leading child expert, adds, "I see discipline as being an element in showing love for a child."

Guidelines for discipline

Most experts recommend that you set your own discipline policies based on two important guidelines:

► **Ensuring your child's safety.** One pediatrician explained, "When your child is reaching for a hot pan on the

stove, that is *not* the time to discuss possible consequences. It's a time to grab the child's hand and say a firm 'NO.'"

► **Helping establish a routine and structure for your child's life.** You'll have fewer pitched battles about clothing if you establish a rule that everyone must be dressed before breakfast—and if you don't worry too much when your child wears a red shirt with orange pants.

Consistency in discipline is also important—from one parent to another, and from one day to another.

Allow for choices

One technique parents use to overcome their child's negativity is to allow their toddler to make choices. Instead of asking, "Do you want to eat lunch now?" (which is likely to lead to a resolute "NO" and then develop into a power struggle), parents will ask, "Would you rather eat a peanut butter sandwich or a cheese sandwich?" "Would you like the red cup or the green cup?" "Do you want yogurt or cheese?"

In this way, the parent has retained control over the big issue—whether or not the child will eat lunch. But by allowing the toddler many little choices, the parent is not only avoiding a conflict, but also building the child's sense of independence and self-esteem.

Accentuate the positive

Discipline is also easier if you emphasize the positive rather than the negative. So you say, "Let's hurry to bed so we can read your favorite book," instead of "I want you in bed *this minute*." You'll find that positive techniques work on children of all ages.

Call 'time out'

And when your child has broken a rule, techniques like "time out" (sitting on a chair or on the stairs for two or three minutes) are almost always more effective than spanking, say many child development experts. Dr. Edward Christopherson, professor of pediatrics at the University of Kansas, points out, "Spanking is not effective teaching." Most parents cannot spank a child without getting upset or angry themselves. And by getting angry, you have taught your child how to upset you.

Rewards

What about rewards for good behavior? Most parents agree that such rewards only teach children to place more value on material objects

than on appropriate behavior. And, as Christophersen observes, "Big people don't get a piece of candy every time they're good. Little people shouldn't either." The best reward you can offer your child is your undivided attention and your pride in his accomplishment.

Because your undivided attention is such a powerful reward for your children, you can increase your child's self-discipline by remembering that he is most likely to do things that will encourage you to pay attention to him. If you ignore your child until he has pulled the cat's tail, he'll learn that he needs to abuse the cat in order to get noticed. But if you stop what you're doing and spend a few minutes playing blocks "because you've been so cooperative while I'm fixing dinner," you're likely to have an easier time preparing meals in the future.

WAYS TO REWARD YOUR CHILDREN

- Talking
- Touching/hugging
- Sitting together
- Smiles and other facial expressions
- Reading together
- Compliments
- Special treats or privileges

Reading Aloud

If you haven't done so already, you'll want to begin the habit of reading to your child every day. Study after study confirms that the single most important thing parents can do to help their children become good readers is to read aloud every day.

Your reading time is a special time you share with your child. It also helps develop your child's attention span. You don't always have to be the one to read to your child (although most parents treasure this opportunity). You can ask a neighbor, an older brother or sister, or a grandparent to share the responsibility. And sometimes, you'll find your toddler will choose a favorite book and "read" it to you.

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, says that your read-aloud times should be balanced with a host of outside experiences to expand your child's horizons. "Pictures of a flower, a plane, or a puppy

hold little attraction for a child who has never seen a flower or a plane, or a puppy," he says. "They are, instead, obstacles to overcome on the page." But once a child has smelled a flower, watched a plane take off, or patted a puppy on the head, his life experience will enrich his reading—and his reading will enrich his life.

Temper Tantrums

Finally, a word about temper tantrums. (Yes, your child will have them.) As difficult as they are for an adult to deal with, it may help you to understand that a child at this age lives entirely in the present. And, says Bruno Bettleheim, "What he cannot do now, he believes he will *never* be able to do; this is the reason for his profound and self-destructive despair." (That will be small comfort when your child is lying in the middle of the grocery store aisle kicking his feet, but it will also help to know that time is truly on your side. Eventually, even the most negative toddler will become a preschooler.)

The Preschool Years

Once children have realized that they are separate individuals, they move on to the next critical stage in their development: developing competence. During the preschool years, typically ages 3–5, your child will be striving to master herself and her environment. And, as Dorothy Corkille Briggs points out in *Developing Your Child's Self-Esteem*, because a preschooler is small and lacks knowledge and coordination, the list of things she *can* do will always be much shorter than the list of things she *cannot* do yet.

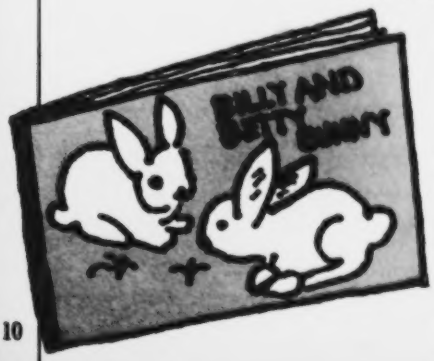
What your preschooler needs is to experience success. You can help by providing such things as:

- Clothes that are easy to put on and take off.
- Step stools that enable a child to reach faucets. (But be careful of step stools in the kitchen, where children may also reach hot burners.)
- Sturdy toys and books that will stand up to some rough treatment.
- Low shelves and coat hooks that make it easier to put possessions where they belong.
- At least a few pieces of furniture scaled to your child's size.

Learning to Communicate

Children who are not spoken to by live and responsive adults will not learn to speak properly. Children who are not answered will stop asking questions. They will become incurious. And children who are not told stories and who are not read to will have few reasons for wanting to learn to read.

—Gail E. Haley
1971 Caldecott Medal acceptance speech



Your interaction with your child is a key to developing her language skills. In your day-to-day conversations with your child, speak in complete sentences—and encourage her to do the same. Teach your child nursery rhymes and say them aloud together. Singing also helps language development. Young children enjoy almost any kind of music—children's songs, rock music, folk tunes, hymns, or whatever kind of music you enjoy.

Your interaction with your child at this time in two other major areas will be a key to developing self-confidence, a key to his success throughout life. The first is responsibility, the second is play.

Responsibility

The preschool years are *not* too early for children to begin assuming some responsibility for caring for themselves and their surroundings. Responsibility builds self-confidence and self-esteem. And it's vital for success in school and on the job.

So your preschoolers can and should be expected to pick up toys (though not by themselves and not without gentle prompting); dress themselves (as long as you don't worry if shirts are worn back-to-front at least some of the time); and help with some of the chores of family life, such as setting the table and dusting.

Children learn habits of responsibility if you:

- ► Expect them
- ► Model them
- ► Participate in them.

In other words, you don't tell a preschooler, "Clean your room." Instead, you say, "I'll put the books back on the shelf. You find all the toys with wheels and put them in the basket."

As your children develop these habits, you'll need to allow plenty of time for them to make mistakes. As Marguerite Kelly and Elia Parsons say in *The Mother's Almanac*, "When you let your child dare to try—and fail—you're showing respect, for it's a child's right to make mistakes too."

Play

The way you play with your child and the way you respond to your child's play can also help her develop self-confidence. Play is the

primary way that children develop during the preschool years. Through play, children:

- Develop their large muscles through vigorous exercise such as running, jumping, climbing, and riding tricycles.
- Learn fine-muscle coordination through such activities as coloring, cutting, pasting, and working with puzzles.
- Learn how to occupy themselves when they are alone.
- Learn to cooperate with others when in a group.
- Develop their imaginations.
- Learn language.

Parents can help their children develop through play by providing a variety of different experiences—some indoors and some outdoors; some noisy and some quiet; some initiated by parents, others following the child's lead.

CHOOSING TOYS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Today, some children have rooms that look like a branch of a local toy store. Others have parents who insist that all toys they buy must be "educational." Sadly, some children have few or no toys. The honest truth is that children do not need a lot of toys—and some of the toys that are the most "educational" are also the most fun.

How can parents choose toys for their children? Begin by asking two important questions:

- Will your child play with it for more than a few minutes?
- Will your child want to play with it more than once?

As you select toys for your child, you should consider the following:

- **There is no correlation between cost and use.** Low-cost toys such as crayons and clay provide a lot of play value.
- **Many toys that children love don't cost any money at all**—just some imagination. A cardboard tube from a roll of paper towels can become a rocket, a telescope, or a castle tower. An old bath towel can become a superhero's cape or a fairy princess' gown.
- **Age recommendations given by manufacturers are sometimes less than reliable.** If your child attends preschool, look to see what toys he plays with. Watch the toys other children enjoy.
- **Some toys quickly attract children but do not have any lasting play value.** Just because a toy is heavily advertised on Saturday morning television doesn't mean it's right for your child. The reason that toys like balls and blocks and bikes have been so popular for so long is because kids like to play with them.
- **Toys must be safe.** That means they should be nontoxic, nonflammable, washable, have smooth edges, have no pins or buttons that can be removed, and no springs that can catch on fingers or hair. If you have any doubts about the safety of a toy, don't buy it.

CHOOSING A PRESCHOOL

Today, because of the success of programs like Head Start, it is clear that preschool education should be available to all children. A study of low-income children found that the effects of a good early educational experience can last throughout life. The famous study of the Perry Preschool Program found that those children who attended preschool:

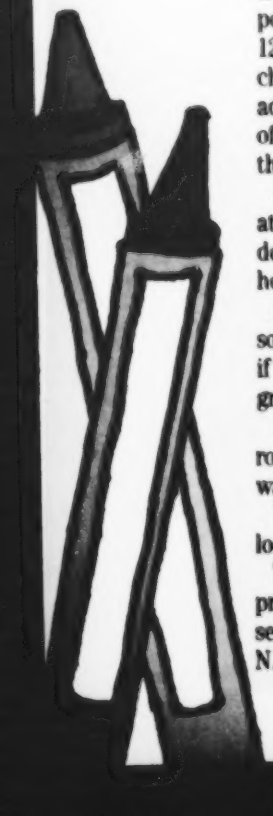
- Were better prepared intellectually and socially for school.
- Progressed better through school, with higher achievement test scores and a greater likelihood to complete homework.
- Were more likely to graduate from high school.
- Were more likely to attend some type of postsecondary education.

But what is a "quality" preschool program? In choosing a preschool for your child, consider the following:

- **There is no one "best" type of preschool education.** Some schools are better for some children than they are for others.
- **Beware of preschools that place a heavy emphasis on academics.** While it is true that some preschool children can be taught to read, studies show that more long-lasting gains come from preschool programs that teach children how to get along in a group, allow them to develop their muscles, build their self-confidence, and learn pre-reading skills—colors, shapes, and numbers.
- **Classes should be small.** Small classes, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), allow each child an opportunity for self-expression. For two-year-olds, class size should not exceed 12, and the ratio of adults to children should be between 1:4 and 1:6. For children age three and older, the maximum class size should be 20 and the adult-child ratio is best between 1:8 and 1:10. Children at this age need plenty of TLC (tender loving care), and only a low adult-child ratio can ensure they get it.
- **Parent involvement is critical.** Parents should be encouraged to visit at any time, and should always be kept informed of how their children are doing. In preschool education—as in all schooling—success is greatest when home and school work together as a team.
- **Teachers need to understand how children develop and learn.** At least some of the teachers should have degrees in early childhood education. Ask if they read and attend meetings to continue to learn more about how children grow and develop.
- **Facilities must be safe.** Smoke detectors should be installed in every room. Emergency numbers should be clearly posted. Staff members should wash their hands with soap and water after changing diapers.

You can usually tell if you've chosen the right school for your child if he looks forward to going and wants to stay longer when you pick him up.

The NAEYC has a free pamphlet for parents on how to choose the right preschool. For a copy of "How to Choose a Good Early Childhood Program," send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: NAEYC, 1834 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20009.



The Elementary School Years

When your child enters elementary school, he begins to identify more closely with friends and teachers. Acceptance from peers is vital for children between ages six and twelve. Friends provide mirrors in which your child learns to see himself.

It is about this time that your child experiences a dramatic change in the way he thinks about the world. He begins to realize that he is not the center of the universe, and that the world outside himself is not magic, but governed by certain discoverable laws. In the model of child development first proposed by Jean Piaget, the child has moved from the "preoperational" stage to the stage of "concrete operations". In other words, children at this age want to learn how things work.

Parents are very important in this new age of discovery. In fact, your acceptance and love will provide your child with a continuous opportunity to "recharge his batteries" as he moves toward learning to stand on his own. These are the years to help your child develop academic, physical, and social skills.

Success in School

When the U.S. Department of Education recently analyzed research on student success—or failure—in school, it noted, "The family is critical to success in school." That holds true regardless of family income or parents' level of education.

Some of the strongest evidence for the importance of parent involvement comes in researcher Benjamin Bloom's landmark study, *Developing Talent in Young People*. Bloom studied people who had reached what they called "world-class levels of accomplishment": Olympic swimmers, Guggenheim Fellowship sculptors, or prize-winning mathematicians, for example.

Over and over again, the researchers found that the *home environment* was critical in helping these high-performing individuals achieve excellence. The families shared a number of characteristics:

- They were hardworking.
- They believed in doing one's best—

whatever the task.

► They believed that everyone, including children, should use time productively and should set goals.

► They emphasized self-discipline.

Bloom found that these individuals reached the high levels of accomplishment *less* because of their talent and *more* because of their hard work and the encouragement they received from family and teachers. In fact, Bloom concluded, "If the talented individuals we studied had been reared in a very different home environment . . . it is not likely that they would have reached the level or type of talent development [they did]."

What can you do to help your child succeed in school? University of Illinois Professor Herbert Walberg has reviewed more than 2,500 studies of what he calls "educational productivity." He suggests that parents can do a number of things:

- ► Provide books and a place for studying.
- ► Observe routines for homework, meals, and bedtime.
- ► Limit the hours for after-school jobs.
- ► Discuss school events.
- ► Help students meet deadlines.

Parent Involvement in School

As a parent, your involvement with the school is a key to your child's performance. Here are just some of the ways you can increase your involvement in and impact on your child's education. (Contact your

child's teacher or principal to find other ways you can help.)

► Become a member of your school's parent-teacher organization.

► Help with a project in or out of the classroom by lending a hand in the library, setting up a computer, building a book shelf, or producing a school newsletter.

► Visit a class to talk about your career.

► Invite a class to visit your work place.

► Set up a "volunteer bank"—noting parents' special interests and abilities.

► Attend a school-sponsored play, performance, or athletic event.

► Attend a school board meeting.

► Serve on a building- or district-based committee, advisory group, or task force.

► Talk with your child about the importance of education. Show your child how you use skills you learned in school on your job. And let your child know you have confidence in his ability to succeed in school.

Building Confidence

In her book *MegaSkills*, Dorothy Rich, director of the Home and School Institute, notes that parents need to provide their children with many opportunities to build confidence in themselves and their own abilities. "These experiences need to be small enough for children to deal with, large enough to encourage growth, and easy enough for parents to work with."

The telephone, she suggests, is "ideal" for giving children an opportunity to develop confidence. Children and their parents can complete a list of emergency telephone numbers—the police, the fire department, a neighbor, and parents' work numbers—and post them near the phone. Then children can practice making telephone calls to report various emergencies.

Another way to build confidence in your child is to help her find things she is good at. Organized sports, dance lessons, art or music activities are all ways to help your child discover abilities outside the classroom. So are things you do together as a family. Cooking is one activity elementary school students enjoy—and everyone can share in the results. Giving a child the opportunity to say, "I hope you'll like the salad—I made it myself," does much more than just provide food for the family. It also provides your child with emotional food for growth, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

Developing Responsibility

From the time you let your toddler choose between the red shirt and the blue one, you were helping her develop a sense of *responsibility* for her own decisions. During the elementary school years, a child needs to assume additional responsibility at home and at school.

Post chores

Many families post a chart that outlines chores that need to be accomplished. You may assign these to various family members, or you may allow some choice. As your elementary school child learns to take care of herself, and as she sees she is making a contribution to the family, she will be learning skills, increasing self-confidence and self-discipline, and establishing habits of responsibility that will last a lifetime.

Limit T.V. Viewing

Structured television viewing offers another way to help your child build responsibility—and also improve his school performance. Studies show that the average American child spends about 25 hours a week watching television. Researchers at Northwestern University's education department found that if grade school students spent just 3.5 hours of that time in reading, they would become "automatic readers" who read faster, score higher, and do better in high school and college.

If you want to limit your family's television viewing, you can help your child develop responsibility by giving him the opportunity to choose which television programs he watches. For example, you may establish a rule that there will be one hour of television a day. At the beginning of the week, have him look through the T.V. listings and choose the programs he wants to watch. You're helping him develop his judgment—and you're giving him responsibility for his own life.

Time to grow

All parents want the best for their child. But some parents are so concerned about their children's success that they may pressure their children too much. Stories of first- and second-graders who are enrolled in sports, music lessons, dance classes, computer classes, *and* foreign language classes after school are becoming increasingly common. Many of the most important tasks of childhood require time—to think, to imagine, to play, to dream.

Early Adolescence

The early teen years (ages 12–14) are a time of rapid change. During these years, your adolescent will be learning to take responsibility for his own life. Just as in the earlier period of establishing a separate identity—the toddler years—your teen's striving for independence will sometimes create anxiety and distress for you.

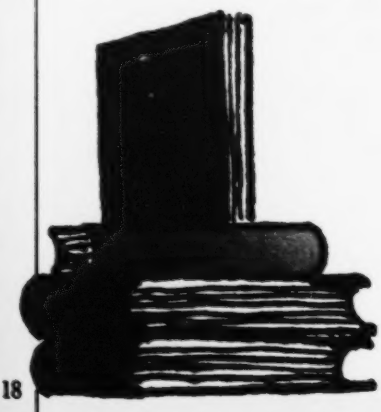
This is a time of enormous and rapid physical changes for young adolescents. Puberty begins sometime between the ages of 10 and 14. What makes the teen years so difficult is that the changes may begin any time during those years. So while teens may be the same *chronological* age, they will look and act very different from one another.

Teens regularly challenge authority. They are beginning to establish a code of behavior that is right for them. "During the period of adolescent turmoil," says Bruno Bettelheim, "it is best when parents can *accept* their adolescent's odd, antagonistic or otherwise unpleasant behavior, *without approving of it.*"

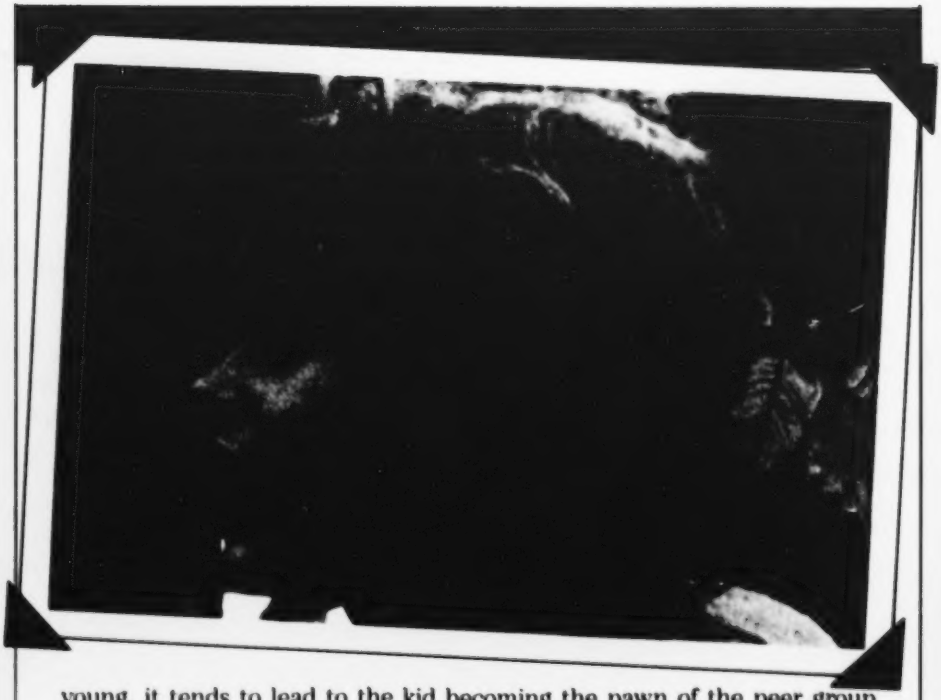
Making Choices

During these early years, your adolescent must make choices—and sometimes, she is going to make mistakes. This is the time when many adolescents experiment with drugs, alcohol, and sexuality. You can be most helpful if you make your own values clear—and keep the lines of communication open.

Roberta Simmons, professor of psychiatry and sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, notes that while children at this age have a growing need for autonomy and independence, they still need careful supervision. "The parent needs to let go a little, but still be protective," she says. "When the child goes out alone, the parent should have rules—know where the child is, and who he is with."



Sandy Dornbusch, director of the Stanford Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth at Stanford University, agrees. He notes that parents of early adolescents often believe that they need to give their teens responsibility for their own behavior. "That sounds great," he says, "but we find that if it's done too



young, it tends to lead to the kid becoming the pawn of the peer group. The parent loses control, and deviant behavior and poor school performance are more likely."

One example of the appropriateness of maintaining some parental control is what happens after school when both parents work. Dornbusch cites research showing that kids who must report to their parents by telephone run no greater risk of misbehavior than teens who have a parent at home after school. "Parents who know and care what the child is doing are much better parents," he says.

Young adolescents have a tremendous need to be accepted by their peers. But despite how much they may rebel against you, *your* acceptance and love are critical to their self-esteem. One of the best ways to help your teenager navigate the difficult road of adolescence is to continue to offer love, praise, and support.

A young teen's ability to make good decisions also is affected by his own sense of self and his abilities, namely, a sense of self-confidence. Here are some ways to help your teen develop self-confidence:

► **Show interest in his activities.** Attend games or performances.

► **Support his growing independence.** Encourage independence by giving him more freedom and also more responsibility. A person who is responsible for washing some of the family's laundry, for example, is old enough to decide what to wear to school.

► **Help him set realistic goals.** One of the best qualities of teenagers is their boundless enthusiasm. But they need help in setting achievable goals so their enthusiasm doesn't turn to disillusionment. If your teen is concerned about hunger, point out that devoting a few

hours a week at a local soup kitchen is a more achievable goal than eliminating all hunger in your community.

► **Sometimes ask your teenager for his thoughts on a problem you are facing.** Together, explore some alternatives. By modeling responsible decision-making behavior, you can help him learn how to make choices for himself.

Finally, it's important for parents to maintain an optimistic viewpoint during this time of transition. Roberta Simmons, co-author of *Moving Into Adolescence*, offers this word of hope:

> Evidence indicates that, for about a a third of children, the transition to adolescence is tumultuous. That's pretty big, but it's not everybody, which people have said. There's a wide variation, and some kids do just fine.

HELPING TEENS MAKE CHOICES

Decision making, like nearly everything else in life, is a skill that can be learned. If you want your teenager to make responsible decisions, you need to help him learn how to do that. By teaching these steps, you will help your adolescent learn to make decisions on his own.

1. **Discuss the problem.** What is it you need to do? What do you know about the problem?
2. **Gather more information.** What do you know from other experiences that would help? What do you need to know more about before making this decision?
3. **List alternatives.** What are all the possible choices? Are there others you have forgotten?
4. **Examine the consequences.** What will be the results—good *and* bad—of each alternative? What are the consequences, in the long and short run, of each? How do you feel about each choice today? How do you think you will feel next week? Next year?
5. **Consider feelings and values.** How do you feel about each alternative? Each consequence? How does each fit with your values, your family's values, and community expectations?
6. **Choose the best possible course of action.**

—Adapted from *Helping Youth Say No*, National Association of State Boards of Education

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The High School Years

In general, older adolescents are searching for their own identity. Psychologist Dr. Haim Ginott says, "A teenager's task is tremendous, and the time is short." Through school activities, work, and friendships, teens are trying to discover who they are—and who they are not.

During the last years of adolescence, teens have four important responsibilities. They need to:

- Establish independence from both their family and their peers so they can move out into the world on their own.
- Develop relationships with members of the opposite sex.
- Prepare themselves for an occupation.
- Establish a meaningful system of values.

Establishing Independence

At this time, teens are striving to establish their near-total independence. This is an important step in helping them prepare for the time when they leave home. Whenever possible, you can help your older teen develop the skills he will need to succeed in the world by letting him know you have confidence in his ability to make choices. Use phrases like:

"Consider the alternatives, but you decide."

"The choice is up to you."

"Here are my thoughts, but it's *your* decision."

Active listening is critical to keeping the lines of communication open during this period. Now is the time to begin to treat your teenager the way you treat other adults. Be attentive to what your teen is saying. Stop what you are doing to focus on what your child has to say. Sometimes body language speaks much louder than words, so try to look for nonverbal cues to what's on her mind. Listen as much as you talk—and when you are talking, be sure to stop before your teenager stops listening.

Preparing for an Occupation

Many teenagers today want after-school jobs. And many parents, believing that jobs foster a sense of responsibility and prepare students for the "real world," encourage their sons or daughters to look for work.

But many educators believe that there *can* be unintended negative consequences from after-school jobs. Problems include:

- Long or late hours, which take away time for studying.
- Reduced opportunities to participate in after-school extracurricular activities.
- Lack of parental control over how much a teenager is earning, or how the money is being spent.

Part-time jobs can be valuable learning experiences. And considering the rising cost of college tuition, they may be an economic necessity for many teenagers. It's a parent's responsibility, though, to make sure that a part-time job is just a part-time activity—no more than 20 hours per week, suggest most educators. Education must remain the top priority for your son or daughter.

Volunteer work is another way for teens to prepare for their future. Rudolf Dreikurs has noted that teenagers need an opportunity to make a valued contribution to their community. In fact, he suggests, adolescence is the time when they are "most eager to feel significant, willing to function within the adult community if it would bring them acceptance and equality."

Helping to find an opportunity for your teenager to do volunteer work—at a day care center, a senior citizens' home, or a homeless shelter for example—is one way to help your teenager learn skills, foster good citizenship, and build self-esteem. Most experts agree that self-esteem is the key to avoiding the pitfalls of adolescence, including drugs, suicide, and teenage pregnancy.

Extracurricular activities also provide teenagers with an opportunity to develop skills and attitudes they'll need on the job. Self-discipline, leadership, and teamwork are just some of the things teens learn on the athletic fields and in the music room, while rehearsing for a play or publishing the school newspaper.

All such activities help show teens the kinds of options they have for their future, and especially the career they might choose. School counselors, of course, are there to help your teenager select the right high school courses and after high school training she will need to make her career choice a reality.

Establishing Values

The old adage that actions speak louder than words is never more true than when helping your adolescent establish his own system of values. It's hard for your teenager to accept the value of good citizenship if you never vote in an election. It's hard to see the importance of honesty if you boast about cheating on your income tax.

Communication is a critical element in helping teenagers develop values. If you have a habit you are trying to change—smoking, for example—talk openly with your teenager about what you're trying to do and why you're making the change. And don't be afraid to set firm limits and explain the reasons behind the rules.

Keeping the lines of communication open during your teenager's high school years will require extra effort on your part. Plan new activities to learn together. Perhaps you can both learn a new sport or sign up for a class that you can take together. (Nothing boosts a teenager's self-esteem so much as finding out he's better at something than Mom or Dad.) Find a project you can work on together to improve your home—perhaps you can paint a room or build a bookshelf. Also, many community agencies need volunteers. By working together on a project to improve your community, you will *both* feel better about your relationship—and about yourselves.

Developing Relationships with the Opposite Sex

Learning how to establish healthy relationships with members of the opposite sex is a critical task of adolescence. But for an increasing number of teens today, sexual activity is a part of dating. The National Research Council estimates that about half of all teenagers are sexually active before they leave high school. A Harris poll found that 20 percent of all U.S. teenagers have had their first sexual experience by the age of 13.

Parents play a key role in helping their teenagers delay sexual activity and thereby avoid the risk of teenage pregnancy or parenting.

One way you can help is to encourage your teen to join such organizations as the Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, the Association of Junior Leagues, and the John F. Kennedy Foundation. These organizations have developed programs that help teenagers make responsible choices about sexuality.

A 1986 survey conducted by the Gallup organization found that most teenagers said they would prefer to receive information on sexuality from their parents. Yet the same study found that 28 percent of sexually active teens have had *no* conversation of any kind about sex with their parents.

Only you can teach your teenager your family and religious values on such issues as sexuality, pregnancy, contraception, and abortion.

And only you can can respond to your teen's specific situation, making sure she understands the consequences—and the risks—of early sexual activity. When communication between you and your teenager becomes difficult, however, it's helpful to set up as many other support systems as you can for your teen. Friends, relatives, coaches, teachers, religious institutions—all provide opportunities for adolescents to feel more secure and self-confident.

Peer Pressure

Teens take their first steps toward independence by establishing close relations with their peer group. Peers help adolescents learn about friendship, trust, and the importance of give-and-take in a relationship. With peers, teenagers learn social skills that will help them throughout their adult lives. But peers can also exert negative pressure. Teens often say they begin to use alcohol and drugs because, "Everybody's doing it."

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS ABUSING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL?

Today, drugs and alcohol are so readily available that you can't assume they will never affect your child. In fact, the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that by their senior year in high school, 93 percent of teens have drunk alcohol—63 percent within the last month. And 36 percent of high school seniors have used marijuana during the last year, with 10 percent reporting they have used cocaine within a year.

Here are some behaviors that may warn you:

- ▶ Abrupt change in mood or attitude.
- ▶ Sudden decline in attendance or performance at work or school.
- ▶ Impaired relationship with family or friends.
- ▶ Ignoring curfews.
- ▶ Increased borrowing of money from parents or friends; stealing from family or employer.
- ▶ Heightened secrecy about actions and possessions.
- ▶ Associating with a new group of friends, especially those who use drugs.

None of these indicators will provide proof that your teenager is experimenting with drugs—any of these may also indicate normal adolescent rebellion. But if you notice several of these changes in behavior—or if they continue and increase over time—you may want to take action to determine whether or not your child is involved with drugs or alcohol.

If your child is using drugs, he will need your help. Seeking the support of other parents in your community will help you handle this problem in a more effective way.

— *Parents: What You Can Do About Drug Abuse*, National PTA.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Raising children is like taking an 18-year course in child development. Parents always need to learn something new: Just as you think you have one stage of development mastered, your child changes and there's lots more to learn.

There are a number of sources for information on parenting. The resources listed at the back of this publication offer suggestions on how to deal with a variety of concerns. Your local community probably also includes a number of resources for parents. If you have questions or concerns about parenting, you might contact:

- **Your child's school.** Many schools offer evening courses on parenting. Some schools also sponsor support groups for students on such issues as drug use and coping with divorce.
- **Religious institutions.** Many churches sponsor courses in parenting, offer counseling to families, and provide space for child care for working parents.
- **Mental health centers.** Most offer free or low-cost counseling.
- **Your public library** may have a listing of specialized resources in your community.
- **Service clubs and organizations.** Lions Clubs International sponsor the *Skills for Adolescence* program in schools around the world. The Association of Junior Leagues sponsors the Teen Outreach Program.

You'll need to:

- **Recognize that self-confidence is critical to dealing with peer pressure.** Teens who feel good about themselves are less likely to give in to pressure to try something they believe is wrong.
- **Anticipate situations and learn to deal with them.** Help your teen develop some responses to dealing with pressure-filled situations.
- **Spend time listening to your teenager.** Listening shows your teen you respect and value his opinions.
- **Help turn peer pressure into *positive* pressure.** Teenagers themselves can be effective advocates of responsible behavior in such areas as drug and alcohol abuse. With support and leadership from adults, teens can help other teens through youth peer programs that bring adolescents together to reinforce positive behavior and mutual support.
- **Know when to take the decision out of your teenager's hands.** Adolescents often *want* their parents' help in making tough decisions. It's easier for your teen to save face by saying, "My parents won't let me go to parties where no adult is present" than to say, "I'd feel uncomfortable at a party where drugs are being used."

A Lifetime Commitment

"Children," says Neil Postman, "are living messages we send to a time we will never see." No legacy you will leave the world is more important than your children.

Being a good parent requires a tremendous investment—of time, of energy, and of unconditional love. And being a parent is a responsibility that continues throughout your child's life. The caring and support you show to your child as an infant and a toddler, from elementary school through high school, is just as important and appreciated as your child goes on to college and beyond. But the reward—watching your child grow into a responsible, caring adult—is truly priceless.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON PARENTING

From the American Association of School Administrators:
—*Homework: Helping Students Achieve*, 1982, Arlington, Virginia.
—*Parents: Partners in Education*, 1982, Arlington, Virginia.
—*Positive Prevention: Successful Approaches to Preventing Youthful Drug and Alcohol Use*, 1985, Arlington, Virginia.
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